EXTENSION IN ACTION

Serving DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt Counties

ILLINOIS EXTENSION 2023





Jamie Boas *County Director*



Breaking barriers, bridging divides: Extension's commitment to inclusivity

I'm thrilled to present our annual report, reflecting on the incredible journey we've shared together this past year at University of Illinois Extension. As your County Director, I'm deeply proud of what we've accomplished, and I want to express my sincere gratitude for your support.

At the heart of everything we do is a commitment to inclusivity and connection. We believe that everyone deserves to feel seen, heard, and valued. That's why we strive to create programs that are open to all, regardless of background or circumstance.

This year, we've made significant strides in achieving this goal. We've launched innovative programs that address the diverse needs of our community and forged collaborative partnerships with local organizations, multiplying our reach and impact. And we've hosted engaging community events that brought people together to learn, celebrate, and build connections. But our success wouldn't be possible without the dedication of our incredible volunteers. They are the backbone of our organization, giving their time and talents to make a difference in the lives of others. Their unwavering commitment truly inspires me.

As we look ahead, we know there are still challenges to face. However, I remain confident that we can build a brighter future for our community by working together and staying true to our values of inclusivity and connection. This report delves deeper into the specific ways we've made a difference, and I encourage you to explore it further.

Thank you for being a part of our journey. We couldn't do it without you.

Jamie Boas County Extension Director

Cover photo: Child participating in butterfly yoga at Monarch Madness.

Illinois Extension Makes an Impact

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's land-grant mission thrives each day through Extension's programs, resources, knowledge, and dedicated staff that are responsive to five grand challenge themes:



Community: Support Strong and Resilient Residents



Economy: Grow a Prosperous Economy

Environment: Sustain Natural Resources at Home and in Public Spaces



Food: Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply

Health: Maximize Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health



Extension leaders, staff, and stakeholders define priorities that create meaningful, mission-centered outcomes throughout the state:

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657 Communities Served	<b>745K+</b> Program Attendees	12.7M+ Webpage Views	58.5M+ Social Media Impressions	1.8M+ YouTube Views
555 Educational Sessions/Week (28K+ Annually)	<b>90</b> Online Courses Accessed by 12K+ People	<b>10,158</b> Local Government Education Webinar Reach	<b>1,799</b> 4-H Clubs	<b>199,400</b> 4-H Experiences





### Thriving adults, thriving communities

Inclusivity isn't just a word at Illinois Extension. Staff have made it a programming priority, as demonstrated by the impactful partnerships with Macon Resources, Inc. and the Piatt County Mental Health Center. These day program providers serve adults with disabilities in Macon and Piatt counties, offering crucial opportunities to build life skills, develop independence, and flourish. Extension programs encompassed horticulture, nutrition and wellness, nature, and life skills development, empowering individuals to build confidence, discover talents, and improve well-being.

### Horticulture

Master Gardener volunteers brought the magic of the outdoors indoors for Piatt County Mental Health Center day program clients. Each month, volunteers shared information about a variety of gardening topics. From Illinois owls to monarch butterflies, participants discovered the awesomeness of nature and the magic of gardening. Piatt County Master Gardeners planned hands-on activities to solidify the lessons. Participants planted salsa gardens in five-gallon buckets, created milk jug greenhouses, made clay pot birdfeeders, and so much more. A visit to Bryant Cottage, a state historical site, moved programming past the four walls of the Piatt Mental Health Center and the Extension office for a gentle respite from everyday routine. Clients toured the onsite gardens and embraced the beauty of nature. The Master Gardener program's partnership with Piatt County Mental Health Center successfully enriches the lives of day program clients.

### **Nutrition and Wellness**

Illinois Extension staff equipped day program clients in Macon and Piatt counties with essential nutrition-based knowledge and skills through engaging, hands-on programming. Participants learned proper handwashing, basic food safety, how to read labels, and diabetes management strategies. Interactive cooking activities reinforced learning and allowed participants to practice skills and develop confidence in the kitchen. Classes also introduced new and unique foods, broadening food horizons and expanding participants' healthy food choices.

The energy of the lessons and the related information to a person's health and the local area we live in helps guide individuals with continuing education in so many ways. Emily Thibeault, Community Day Services, Macon Resources, Inc.

Macon Resources clients particularly enjoyed preparing breakfast and making fruit pizzas, while Piatt County Mental Health Center clients thought practicing their measuring skills to make trail mix was fun. Nutrition and Wellness classes empower adults with disabilities by providing individuals with the tools they need to lead healthy lifestyles.

### Master Naturalists

Glacier's Edge Master Naturalists also recognized Illinois Extension's commitment to inclusive programming and planned two programs for MRI clients. In the summer, Master Naturalist volunteers and Illinois Extension welcomed MRI clients to the Macon County office to learn about hummingbirds. Volunteers guided participants in making bird feeders from toilet paper rolls covered in peanut butter while the cheerful songs of Illinois birds played in the background. The buzz in the room increased to excited chatter as participants shared their plans to hang their bird feeders.

In the fall, Master Naturalist volunteers partnered with Rock Springs Conservation Center for an interactive sensory experience. MRI clients bravely reached into an enclosed container, pulled out an animal pelt, and tried to guess the animal. Master Naturalist volunteers then shared information about the native Illinois animals, expanding the individuals' knowledge about the nearby animals. For program participants, these two accessible programs established a connection to the natural world and an appreciation for something bigger than themselves.

### 4-H Youth Development

Illinois Extension reached young learners through inclusive summer programs. Macon County 4-H staff worked with middle and high school students in life skills classes, offering hands-on activities like planting and dissecting seeds, preparing food from recipes, and practicing mindfulness. 4-H staff collaborated with Macon County Skills, a life skills daycare program,



Someone is all smiles after finishing a breakfast sundae.

to introduce basic cooking and gardening to the children. The program's culmination was a fun salsa-making session using tomatoes the children had planted and harvested. These inclusive programs recognize the importance of early development of life skills to build self-esteem and a sense of belonging in the community.

Illinois Extension remains dedicated to expanding accessible educational opportunities. Staff will continue to design innovative and accessible offerings that break down barriers, empower individuals of all abilities, and cultivate a brighter future for all.



Youth find purpose in outdoor activities Screens and technology present a challenge for getting youth outdoors. Piatt County 4-H understands the vital role that nature plays in healthy development and is committed to providing more intentional outdoor educational opportunities for youth.

One such program, the 4-H Green Communities program, is an initiative that aligns with the state forest plan to address the issue of declining forest cover in Illinois. Staff invited local 4-H clubs and school groups to participate in this program by planting native oak trees in two state parks, one county park, and on school grounds. Involvement in these programs helped youth understand the importance of environmental stewardship and how even the smallest contributions can make a difference.

Thriving youth are the core of healthy, robust communities. Illinois Extension's mentorshipbased youth development model focuses on social competence, academic success, career development, and community connection. The 4-H experience creates opportunities and environments for all youth to thrive now and in the future.





Fishing is my new favorite thing in the world, even more than video games.

Building on the success of the 4-H Green Communities program, 4-H staff created the innovative 4-H Passport to the Outdoors program to reconnect youth with the natural world. Through a variety of hands-on experiences across three counties, the youth felt the excitement of reeling in their first fish, navigating woodland trails, and witnessing the rewards of a community garden. Each activity fostered a sense of accomplishment, built self-reliance, and ignited a love for the outdoors.

These programs were more than just outdoor adventures. Illinois Extension helped youth establish lifelong connections to nature and empowered the next generation to become responsible stewards of the environment.



DeWitt, Macon and Piatt 4-H go.illinois.edu/Dmp4H



New technologies continue to evolve, but unfortunately, access to relevant skill development and training lags, particularly for underresourced communities. Drone technology is one example where this disparity is present. Macon County 4-H recognized this challenge and partnered with Stephen Decatur Middle School to launch an exciting STEM curriculum, the Drones in Agriculture 4-H program.

By modeling the 4-H philosophy of "learn by doing," 4-H staff guided students through an exploration of drone applications. Students learned piloting and coding skills through hands-on training and participated in discussions to understand complex procedures and regulations. The program revealed how a recreational activity such as drone piloting could pave the way for the future, creating an opportunity for all.





#### From farm to fork: 4-H program explores food literacy

Where does the food in school lunches come from? That was the question tackled by the 4-H agriculture awareness program at Clinton Elementary School during Harvest Days. Second and third graders, with the help of DeWitt County 4-H staff, explored the origins of many food items found in school lunches. Students learned how corn and soybeans transform into delicious, tasty treats, and the discussion expanded to international school lunches and the global origins of those foods. The final activity was a sampling of international snack foods, including Australian licorice, seaweed squares, and Japanese pocky sticks, deepening their understanding of the interconnected world. Through this program, students gained a deeper appreciation for farmers, fields, and global connections.

### Food challenge cultivates creativity and confidence

Food insecurity is a reality in many communities, highlighting the importance of resourcefulness. Partnering with Bement High School's Foods Class, Piatt County 4-H staff brought the innovative 4-H Food Challenge to life. Students learned food safety principles, practiced kitchen skills, and discovered the importance of healthy choices for a balanced diet. Through weekly challenges, they transformed surprise ingredients into delicious dishes, demonstrating their creativity and resourcefulness. The grand finale was a competition judged by principals and the superintendent. Students presented their dishes and discussed challenges and lessons learned. Judges evaluated the dishes based on ingredients, preparation, taste, and appearance. The 4-H Food Challenge was more than just a cooking competition; students gained new culinary skills and a greater confidence in their ability to cook healthy, delicious meals, even with limited resources.





#### Real world readiness: Equipping students for financial success

The shift towards digital finances has resulted in young adults losing some basic budgeting and banking skills. Additionally, schools often lack the time and resources to provide students with a comprehensive career development program. DeWitt County 4-H staff offered a modified version of Welcome to the Real World, a Financial Literacy and Career Development program, to Clinton High School students in the foods and consumer science class. The culmination of this six-day program featured a simulation facilitated by several community leaders representing the banking, finance, and insurance sectors. Students worked with these leaders to understand bank accounts, the use of debit cards, home and auto loans, home, auto, and life insurance, and other relevant topics facing adults. Business leaders shared tips and tricks to equip students to make life choices when navigating the adult world with real consequences.



### Volunteers champion pollinators

Pollinators, nature's tiny winged heroes, face many threats, from habitat loss to pesticide use. However, Illinois Extension Master Gardener volunteers have worked tirelessly to raise awareness and inspire action across DeWitt, Macon, and Piatt counties.

DeWitt and Piatt volunteers spread their enthusiasm for bees by educating diverse audiences about native Illinois bees, their life cycles, and the importance of providing them with suitable habitats. Volunteers led hands-on Mason bee home workshops where participants created shelters to welcome these pollinators to their backyards. Program participants reported adopting pollinator-friendly practices, planting flowers, and adding bee homes to their gardens.

There is growing evidence that time spent around plants and in green spaces has many benefits, including improved health, better interpersonal relationships, and a higher quality of life. Sustainable home landscapes also increase property values and build stronger ecosystems for plants and wildlife.

### Raising awareness and protecting monarchs

The plight of the monarch, with the decline in population and disappearing habitats, also continued to be a focus for Master Gardeners. DeWitt and Piatt Master Gardeners educated the community through tag and release events and engaging presentations on the monarch's lifecycle and dwindling habitat. Volunteers distributed milkweed seeds and growing instructions to encourage homeowners to support these pollinators in their backyard gardens.



A Monarch Madness attendee proudly shows her temporary tattoo.

### Engaging all ages in butterfly conservation

Building on the momentum, Macon County Master Gardeners, in collaboration with Master Naturalists and 4-H staff, hosted Monarch Madness at Rock Springs Center. This day-long event welcomed all ages for fun and immersive butterfly-themed activities. Children donned colorful masks and fluttered through mindfulness yoga sessions with colorful capes. A virtual reality experience transported youth to the heart of a monarch's world, while an obstacle course mirrored the caterpillar's transformative journey. But, the highlight of the day was witnessing tagged monarchs being released into the sky, embarking on their next journey.

The dedication of the Master Gardeners serves as a reminder that every action, however small, can contribute to a healthier planet and a future where butterflies dance freely on vibrant wings.



Master Gardener and Master Naturalist Volunteers

10,954 Volunteer Hours



\$358,970 Volunteer Value

Master Gardener go.illinois.edu/DmpMg

# All ages benefit from nutrition workshops

In collaboration with Memorial Wellness Center, Illinois Extension expanded access to valuable nutrition and wellness education for older adults. Quarterly programs focused on healthy cooking with trendy appliances like electric pressure cookers and air fryers. Participants gained knowledge in food safety, shopping and budgeting, and general nutrition, equipping them with the tools for everyday healthy choices. A resounding 96% reported learning valuable nuggets of information, ready to be implemented in their daily lives. This partnership exemplified Illinois Extension's commitment to partnering with community organizations to address critical needs. The program's success paves the way for continued collaboration and expansion, ensuring that more older adults have access to the knowledge and tools and knowledge needed for healthier, happier lives.

As new and modern cooking technologies appear on the market, there is often a learning curve for adults. Some may need help understanding how a new appliance, such as an air fryer, can be used or what foods can be prepared. Even if an appliance has been purchased, the lack of knowledge may result in it remaining unused and in the box. Hot and Fast: Cooking with an Air Fryer, a hands-on program developed by Illinois Extension, traveled to seven locations and empowered 126 adults to embrace this trendy kitchen appliance. This 90-minute stand-alone class featured recipe demonstrations and hands-on cooking, showcasing the convenience and versatility of the air fryer. Participants learned to ditch the reheating rut and unleash all of the healthy eating possibilities this appliance offers.

### Fun in the Kitchen equips kids with essential skills

The addition of a Nutrition and Wellness staff member allowed Illinois Extension to expand programming to young chefs. Fun in the Kitchen, a hands-on cooking class, introduced kids 8 to 14 years of age to basic cooking skills. During each session, participants tackled practical kitchen skills while learning about food safety, food prep, and how to read a recipe. Each week's lesson built on the previous week, inspiring confidence and increasing knowledge and healthy habits.

Fun in the Kitchen is a great example of Illinois Extension's commitment to fostering healthy communities and empowering young people through the joy of cooking and nutritious living.

I learned that onions make me cry when I chop them, and they taste hot. Program Participant





### Finding opportunities to share knowledge Homeowners often face the daunting task of pruning their fruit

trees. Without employing this practice, fruit trees often struggle with excess branches that block the sunlight from reaching the inner parts of the tree, and dense foliage can allow pests and diseases to thrive. Consistent pruning benefits tree health and structure by encouraging stronger branches, thereby increasing the tree's overall health. Yet, aside from all these benefits, homeowners are still hesitant to make the first cut.

The Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop at Crossing Healthcare Gardens helped anxious homeowners understand best practices for pruning through a step-by-step explanation and on-site demonstration led by Illinois Extension staff.

Participants watched branches fall from the tree while hearing about the whys and how-tos of pruning. After the demonstration, participants picked up their loppers and shears to practice their technique and receive immediate feedback.

At first, there was some hesitation when making cuts, but that soon disappeared, and more confident and precise cuts caused branches to fall once again.

Whether large commercial agriculture operations, small farms, or community and backyard gardens, the future of our food supply relies on the use of practices that boost production and capacity. Growers at all levels benefit from effective, efficient, and sustainable approaches to cultivating produce, crops, and livestock that feed their families, communities, and the world.



Extension Educator Doug Gucker explains pawpaw characteristics to Gardening Insights participants.

### Pawpaws cultivate community interest

Pawpaws are experiencing a surge in popularity, and Illinois Extension has been leading the charge to provide community education.

Pawpaw is native to the state but is more prevalent in southern and central Illinois. The pawpaw tree is low maintenance, suitable to Illinois' climate, and provides food for wildlife. It's no wonder the excitement around its fruit has continued to grow.

I've never tasted anything like this. It has an amazing flavor! Program Participant

In-person classes delved into the fascinating world of the pawpaw. Participants learned about tree and fruit basics, cultivar selection, and fruit processing. For many, this was an opportunity to hear firsthand about this mysterious and unique fruit. Many participants had little experience with pawpaws, so when offered a tasting of pawpaw bread, they eagerly sampled the homemade treat.

The unique banana custard-like texture of the pawpaw was a true surprise, as was hearing that this sweet, creamy fruit is rich in antioxidants, vitamin C, and fiber, making it a deliciously healthy treat.

Illinois Extension will continue to foster knowledge and appreciation for the pawpaw, empowering communities to plant, cultivate, and enjoy this native fruit.



Know How Know More Blog go.illinois.edu/khkm

# Funding and programs

Funding for Illinois Extension comes from a combination of local, county, state, and federal dollars returned to the community through educational programming.

	DEWITT, MAC	ON AND PIATT INCOM 2023	E		
\$713,022	Cou	nty Board			
\$553,277	State County Board Match				
\$99,164	Federal Income				
\$115,000	Program Income				
\$110,000	State Income				
\$40,000	Gifts	Gifts/Donations/Grants			
\$14,180	Loca	Local Sources			
\$19,505	4-H	4-H Premiums			



*SNAP-Ed programming numbers are the result of unfilled community worker positions for 2023.

Illinois Extension engages diverse audiences through a multilayered marketing approach. Two billboards on opposite sides of Decatur promoted the user-friendly website. Purchased ad space in the TV Revue and Decatur Area Living Magazine expanded program reach. All of these efforts, combined with a robust online presence, ensured that valuable resources empowered individuals and communities across the board.



5.448 Total Followers on 6 Pages



# 2023-2024 Extension Council Members

Sonya Anthony Macon County Janet Boomer

Macon County

**Brooks Brown** 

Macon County

DeWitt County

Cassie Crouch

Macon County

Grace Clark

Kathie Drozs DeWitt County

Wayne Dunning Macon County

Jerry Edwards Piatt County

April Gum DeWitt County

Piatt County

**Taylor Crouch** Macon County Todd Henricks



Merry Lanker Macon County

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**Cheryl Sample** Macon County

Mike Randall

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Rachel Davidson Program Coordinator, 4-H Youth Development

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### Illinois Extension UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate, please contact the event coordinator. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your needs.

#### College of Agricultural, Consumer & Environmental Sciences

University of Illinois, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Local Extension Councils Cooperating. University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

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